

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7671

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 11830

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TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: VINOBA BHAVE'S FAST FOR A BAN ON COW SLAUGHTER

REF: NEW DELHI A-225

1. IN AN APPARENT LAST-MINUTE EFFORT TO HEAD OFF VINOBA BHAVE'S THREATENED FAST ON THE COW SLAUGHTER ISSUE, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI DISPATCHED TAMIL NADU GOVERNOR M.L. SUKHADIA TO VINOBA'S PAUNAR ASHRAM OVER THE WEEKEND TO WORK OUT A COMPROMISE. WE GATHER FROM PRESS REPORTS THAT SUKHADIA CAME TO DELHI ON AUGUST 6, MET WITH THE PRIME MINISTER CONCERNING "SOME IMPORTANT MISSION" AND THEN TRAVELLED TO NAGPUR THAT EVENING. ACCORDING TO THE AUGUST 9 BOMBAY EDITION OF THE "INDIAN EXPRESS," SUKHADIA HELD A PAIR OF TWO-HOUR MEETINGS WITH VINOBA AT THE ASHRAM ON AUGUST 8 AND THEN RETURNED TO DELHI FOR ANOTHER MEETING WITH MRS. GANDHI ON AUGUST 9. JUDGING FROM REPORTS REACHING CONGEN BOMBAY, THE SUKHADIA MISSION WAS THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF TALKS INVOLVING VINOBA AND VARIOUS CONGRESS(R) AND GOI OFFICIALS.

2. ACCORDING TO A CONGEN BOMBAY SOURCE, THIS LATEST
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EFFORT TO REACH A COMPROMISE ON THE COW SLAUGHTER ISSUE MAY

BE SUCCESSFUL. THE SOURCE HAD STATED THAT VINOBA MAY BE WILLING TO SETTLE FOR SOMETHING LESS THAN AN IMMEDIATE BAN ON COW SLAUGHTER AND MAY ACCEPT A SOLUTION WHICH WOULD INVOLVE THE APPOINTMENT OF A FACT-FINDING COMMISSION ON THE SUBJECT.

3. ACCORDING TO AUGUST 12 PRESS REPORTS, MRS GANDHI'S STOP-GAP EFFORTS AT REACHING A COMPROMISE WITH THE ACHARYA ARE STILL ACTIVE. SAMACHAR CARRIED A BRIEF ITEM TO THE EFFECT THAT "OWING TO CERTAIN IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS" VINOBA HAD CALLED UPON HIS FOLLOWERS AT THE ASHRAM TO CONDUCT ONLY A 36-HOUR FAST AND PRAYER "IN HOMES AND PRIVATE PLACES" IN ORDER TO "FOCUS THE ATTENTION OF THE AUTHORITIES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COW PROTECTION, "BUT TO CANCEL ALL OTHER PROGRAMS." SAMACHAR REPORTS THAT THE ACHARYA AND HIS FOLLOWERS BEGAN THE FAST AT PAUNAR ON THE MORNING OF AUGUST 11. ALSO THAT VINOBA HAD APPEALED TO HIS FOLLOWERS TO CANCEL ALL PROGRAMS, INCLUDING PADAYATRAS, BECAUSE HE "WANTED TO GIVE SUFFICIENT TIME TO THE GOVERNMENT TO CONSIDER THIS ISSUE."

4. IN A RELATED MOVE, THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ON AUGUST 11 IN THE RAJYA SABHA THAT THE RECENTLY-REVIVED COW PROTECTION COMMITTEE (WHICH MANY OBSERVERS THOUGHT WAS GOING TO ISSUE ITS INTERIM REPORT IN THE NEAR FUTURE) HAD REQUESTED AND BEEN GRANTED MORE TIME TO FINALIZE ITS RECOMMENDATIONS. THE COMMITTEE HAS BEEN GIVEN UNTIL MAY 31, 1977 TO ISSUE ITS REPORT.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH "FIRM" DETAILS ARE DIFFICULT EVER TO PIN DOWN WHEN VINOBE BHAVE'S INTENTIONS ARE INVOLVED, IT DOES APPEAR THAT SOME SORT OF DEAL MAY HAVE BEEN WORKED OUT BETWEEN GOVERNOR SUKHADIA AND VINOBA BHAVE DURING THE PAST WEEKEND. IN RETURN FOR THE ACHARYA'S LIMITING OF HIS PRELIMINARY AUGUST 11 FAST TO A TOKEN 36 HOURS AND CANCELLING RELATED AGITATIONAL ACTIVITIES BY HIS FOLLOWERS, THE GOI SEEMS TO HAVE AGREED TO THE ACTION WHICH CONGEN BOMBAY'S SOURCE HAD THEORIZED, I.E. THE CONSTITUTION OF A FACT-FINDING COMMISSION (WHICH ACTUALLY HAD BEEN REVIVED ABOUT

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A MONTH AGO). BY AGREEING TO GRANT IT MORE TIME TO FINALIZE ITS RECOMMENDATIONS, MRS GANDHI MAY HAVE BOUGHT HERSELF MORE TIME AND APPEASED VINOBA SUFFICIENTLY SO THAT HE WILL IN TURN DELAY HIS MAJOR FAST IN SEPTEMBER. OTHER SOURCES IN DELHI, HOWEVER, ARE UNSURE OF WHAT BHAVE WILL DO AND DO NOT EXCLUDE A FURTHER SERIES OF GO/NO-GO DECISIONS ON THE SEPTEMBER FAST. END COMMENT.
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